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ABSTRACT

A guide intended to assist the researcher, trainer, or writer seeking to serve the rural principal is developed around the functions of the rural school principal. A definition and a list of functions are provided for each of six classification areas: curriculum and instructional leadership, personnel guidance, school community relations, administrator responsibilities, evaluation responsibility, and professional improvement. (AH)

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THE RURAL PRINCIPALSHIP

A Fruitful Field for Research and Service

by

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This paper was presented at the National Conference of Professors in Educational Administration, August 1982, San Marcos, Texas.

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ABSTRACT

The Rural Principalship: A Fruitful Field for Research and Service

by Alfred P. Wilson, Kansas State University.

The author recently completed a commissioned work titled The Principalship In Rural America. In doing the research for the monograph it became apparent that very little information is available to provide guidance to rural school principals about what they do, or should do. A guide to assist the researcher, trainer, or writer seeking to serve the rural principal is presented.

This paper was presented at the National Conferences of Professors of Educational Administration, August 1982, San Marcos, Texas.

Copies are available by writing Dr. Alfred P. Wilson, College of Education, Kansas State University, Manhattan, Ks. 66506.

The Rural Principalship

Recently the author was commissioned to write a monograph for the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools (CRESS) at New Mexico State University. After about six months of research, The Principalship In Rural America was published January, 1982. This paper is partially taken from part of that exhaustive work.

In writing the monograph, a research review was done, using Resources in Education, Current Index to Journals in Education, University Microfilms International, and Education Index. The hope was that abundant material would be available to provide information about rural school principals and what they do, or should do. However, the conclusions drawn from this search are that not only is the material for rural principals deficient, but on many topics there is nothing specific available in any form. The frustration at discovering such a dearth of information was disconcerting. It was almost as if a conscious effort had developed to thwart efforts which might help the rural principal. Clearly, titles such as The Neglected Americans, and Imaginary Gardens? Real Problems, are descriptive of the neglect that has afflicted the literature for the rural principalship.

Some things are common to management/administration whether a person is working for American Telephone and Telegraph or Randolph Public Schools. However, rationales such as "Rural Principals are not all the same, so you can't write for them" are only partially

true. Generic writing can carry us only so far. There are generic school administration/management skills and there are generic principal skills. The rural principal should be using the available generic information. It is not difficult to see, however, that the rural principals have been bilked by the authors, organizations, and environments that should be serving them! The groups have written to and conducted inservice workshops for the urban/suburban principal. Yet in the process the rural principal has been lost.

Is There Any Help for the Rural Principal?

(A terse statement, by category, of available literature and training)

Generic for administrators/managers
Assessment: Copious

Generic for educational administrators/managers
Assessment: Abundant

Generic for principals
Assessment: Abundant

Generic for principals by level (i.e. elementary, middle, high school)
Assessment: Ample, with more for secondary than other areas

Specific for rural principals (as a group or by level)
Assessment: Scant, with a death of available material

Specific for rural principals in varied environments (i.e. isolated, "boom town")
Assessment: Wanting, with neglect apparent

Generic works are valuable. However we need high-quality work that is written specifically for the rural principal. While some work is being done for the rural principal, more specific research is needed to assist rural principals in their unique settings. Only some rurals are working in small school environments. Only some rural principals are experiencing declining enrollments. Only some rural schools are located in the Midwest. The multiple and varied dimensions that affect rural principals must be addressed while general work for the rural principal is proceeding.

A Place to Begin

Since the literature has been found wanting, solutions are in order. A guide that may assist the researcher, trainer, or writer seeking to serve the rural principal can be found in an effort begun earlier in this decade. The author and his research assistants did a complete analysis by paragraph of articles and books written on the principalship. The result was a presentation of the school principal's functions.

These functions were then used to evaluate expectations of varied populations concerning what principals "ought to be doing." Through the use of specialized observation techniques, further analysis was undertaken about what principals are actually doing. Finally, a few training programs were developed for some of the principal's functions.

The work was generic to all principals. It was not completed specifically for rural principals, nor was it done for specific sub-populations of rural principals. Such work needs to be done. Here, the functions have been adapted to the rural principal and are presented in six classification areas. A more complete

description of each category and function is contained in work developed by the author and graduate students at Kansas State University.

The Functions of Rural School Principals

I. Curriculum and Instructional Leadership

Definition: Curriculum is that set of stimuli that is planned or designed to occur within the total setting of the learner. Included in the definition are events such as music, sports, and drama as well as experience with academic and vocational subjects. Instructional leadership is the supervision and/or improvement of the curriculum through activities such as planning, organizing, directing, observing or evaluating.

Functions: Working with staff in curriculum and instruction; financing curriculum and instruction; planning facilities for curriculum and instruction; adapting facilities for curriculum and instruction; new teacher orientation; in-service education; planning for the use of curriculum materials; selecting learning resource techniques; defeloping articulation between schools; curriculum supervision; working with consultants in curriculum and instruction; evaluating curriculum consultant's services; defining school philosophy and objectives; citizenship training; handling controversial issues in curriculum and instruction; academic freedom; defining types of curriculum and instructional strategies; evaluating resource materials in curriculum and instruction; acting as a resource person; and participation as a classroom teacher.

II. Personnel Guidance

Definition: Guidance that is directed to assist individuals concerning personal habits, attitudes, and problem matters pertaining to schooling, courses, curricula, and school life.

Functions: Staff (teachers, secretaries, custodians, maintenance personnel, nurses, librarians, social workers, psychologists, paraprofessional personnel, and security personnel) selection; staff assignment; staff transfer; staff evaluation; staff promotion; staff dismissal; staff supervision grievances; morale; physical and mental health; stimulation of staff; staff coordination; staff communications; admission of pupils; student promotion, failure and retention; student grouping; drop-out prevention; providing for individual differences; providing for the exceptional youngster; pupil health services; pupil guidance services; standardized testing; pupil evaluation; pupil progress reporting; student transportation; safety; monitoring truancy and drug usage; co-curricular activities; and personnel conflict management.

III. School/Community Relations

Definition: Maintaining positive relatipnships between the school, its staff members, and the people of the community, particularly with respect to the manner in which the school staff and community members coordinate efforts in assisting pupils to derive optimum benefit from their educational experience.

Functions: Interpreting school programs; determining community expectations of the school; communicating with parents through the media and in conferences; coordinating parent visits to school; working with PTA and related groups; interaction with school critics; coordination of and/or making home visits; organizing publicity campaigns; overseeing student publications; appraisal of school/community relations; working with industry and organized community groups; and determining the community power structure.

IV Administrative Responsibilities

Definition: The coordination of people and facilities toward the achievement of educational goals through three broad methods: (1) discerning and influencing goal and policy development; (2) establishing and coordinating activities; and (3) managing resources, money, and materials.

Functions: Implementing board policies; implementing state school laws; shaping system-wide policy; forming working relationships with central administration; maintaining school facilities; managing school equipment; evaluating service personnel (e.g. secretaries and custodians); conducting school business; managing school supplies; preparing budget and budget accoutning; planning of yearly school opening and closing and school calendar; facilities planning; scheduling classes and activities; anticipating work stoppage; altering length of school year and/or days; working with student hygiene; and completing reports.

V. Evaluation Responsibility

Definition: A judgment of the value of a particular performance, accomplishment or objective made according to a set of appropriate criteria.

Functions: Cooperative planning for evaluation; self evaluation; evaluating instructional leadership techniques; improving the process for evaluating teachers; selecting techniques for teacher evaluations; using results of teacher evaluations; using results of evaluations of the principal; evaluating transportation service; evaluating safety standards; evaluating the library program; evaluating educational travel; identifying needs; evaluating facilities; and evaluating processes used for supporting instruction, such as field trips.

VI. Professional Improvement

Definition: Keeping current on educational issues and processes.

Functions: Keeping abreast of current research; attending state, local and national conventions and inservice meetings; professional reading; developing professional resource materials; doing action research; preparing for presentations; obtaining membership in professional and community groups; and interacting with colleagues.

It is hoped that those studying the rural school principal will use the functions listed above to develop training programs, provide research, and develop quality material for the rural school principal. It is time that the past neglect of rural school principals was rectified.